9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

Corrib). Difficulties of communication are such that the Central Plain has never been central in anything more than name: Athlone has become a national centre only with radio communication, and the Shannon remains a boundary river throughout its course. The important part of the plain is the fifty mile stretch which faces the Irish Sea between the bays of Dundalk and Dublin, the heart of the old Kingdom of Meath and of the English Pale, and the setting of Ireland's capital sites from the sacred tombs of New Grange through the age of Celtic Tara to the historic city of Dublin. One factor in the location of this metropolitan area is suggested by Fig. 8; it is favoured by the relatively low rainfall of less than 30 ins.

133 [207] ● 133 175 [132]

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

nuclei. We may think of the four kingdoms as slowly crystallizing throughout prehistoric times around areas of primary settlement among the hills. The political organization of these areas had to await the coming of Celtic conquerors, but fundamental in their differentiation are the divergencies in megalithic practice. The penetration of megalithic culture to all parts of the island is one of the most striking facts in the prehistory of Ireland. Again and again, in seeking for the origins of persistent customs we find ourselves led back to the megalith builders and their monumental preoccupation with death and the afterworld. The domination of the megalithic cult was much more complete in the western isle than in Britain, where it took root mainly in the uplands facing the Irish Sea.

All around the Irish coasts the megalith builders found hill masses where shallow soils and thinning forests gave them a foothold and ice-carried boulders provided the material for their gigantic tombs and ritual circles. It is significant that the megaliths appear to fall into four major regional groups—five if we include the Boyne area—which correspond with the historic provinces. This has been most clearly demonstrated for Ulster where the distribution of 'horned cairns' has been shown to correspond closely with the upland areas north of the Dundalk-Sligo line.[1] Similarly Meath, Dublin and Louth contain the finest passage-graves, of which New Grange on the Boyne is the supreme example. I have no doubt that the ground pattern of regional differentiation in Ireland was established in the megalithic era during the first half of the second millennium B.C.

It remains to say something of the lowland heart of Ireland where the four provinces meet along the line of the middle Shannon north and south of Lough Ree, which is the geometrical centre both of the lowlands and of the whole island. Near-by Athlone, therefore, serves as the centre of Eire's broadcasting system, but in no terrestrial sense is this bog-strewn central lowland a dominant cultural region. Its function has been largely negative, for it has served as a refuge area remote from the contacts of the coastal fringe and the urban forces which radiate

[1] O. Davies and E. E. Evans, 'The Horned Cairns of Ulster', *U.J.A.* 6 (1943), 7–23.

16:Messenger E-4,5 (1955-1966) 1969 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
(1959-1960) Inis Beag

Climate

821 Whether or not the steamer calls at Inis Beag, especially during the winter months when severe storms are frequent, is of considerable psychological significance. The importance of weather conditions as they impinge, both directly and [182] indirectly, on this tiny island far out in the ocean cannot be overemphasized. Most [521] activities, and not only farming and fishing, are more or less affected by the [676] climate, and the past, present, and future states of the weather figure prominently in conversations among the folk. It is customary for individuals when meeting to talk first of the weather before turning to other matters, and some of the common greetings pertain to immediate conditions: "It is raining.", "It is windy.", or "It is a beautiful day." These are usually the phrases first mastered by non-Gaelic speakers who spend time in Inis Beag, along with the most used greeting—"God bless you." and its reply, "God and Mary bless you."

132 The year around climate of Inis Beag might be labeled cool, humid, rainy, [127] and windy, at least by one living in the Great Lakes region of the United States. A perusal of lighthouse records for the decade 1951 to 1960 revealed a mean temperature of 42 degrees (all figures Fahrenheit) for the winter months, December to March, and 59 degrees for the summer ones, June to September. During that decade, the lowest and highest temperatures recorded in Inis Beag, both during 1955, were 28 and 80 degrees respectively. January was the coldest month, with a mean temperature of 39 degrees, and July was the warmest, with 61 degrees. The island is located in a climatic zone in which the average rainfall is 40 to 50 inches per year; the average number of rain days per year is 225, and the average June sun hours per day is five and a half.

> Westerly winds predominate in Ireland, though naturally a climate experiencing the passage of so many depressions has winds from every quarter at some time during the year... Winds of gale force are most frequent in the northwest, where they average 40 per year... Most of the gales are from a westerly direction: they are so severe a menace to shipping that many inhabitants of [137] islands and remote coastal districts... profit from periodic salvage hauls... The absence of trees on the exposed western coasts of Ireland is usually regarded as a direct result of the exposure to westerly winds... (Freeman 1960:50–51).

Snow usually falls several times during the winter, but it melts within hours as the temperature seldom fails to climb above freezing on any day. During the months from June to August, the sea and air are often warm enough to encourage 821 "comfortable" swimming by tourists, usually off the strand. The islanders consider May the ideal month so far as climate is concerned, for the weather tends to be cool, dry, and windy; flowers grow in profusion and birds return in great numbers. March weather, which is much colder but also dry and windy, is called "hard."

All of the adults of Inis Beag are amateur weather forecasters; however, [815] several old men are considered to be specialists in the art. Some households possess barometers, and forecasts on the radio are listened to attentively by those who own [207] sets. But, in the main, the folk prefer to make their own prognostications based on traditional signs, most of which are sound meteorologically and the outgrowth of

16:Messenger E-4,5 (1955-1966) 1969 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
(1959-1960) Inis Beag

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178 ble to visit Inis Beag frequently, as the cost and distance are slight compared to a journey across the Atlantic.

The many vacationing emigrants who now return to the island at Christmas or Easter or during the summer months often succeed in persuading relatives and acquaintances to return to England with them. Those so persuaded declare that they will return soon with their "fortunes" to settle permanently, but they seldom do once "emancipated." Since the Second World War, several Americans have returned home, and their stories of life in the United States make the youth restive. Tourists who remain for weeks and months in Inis Beag and come to know many islanders also sow the seeds of discontent. A favorite subject of talk in the pubs is the relative advantages to be gained from migrating to particular cities in England and America, and anthropologists as well as returned emigrants are called on as consultants in this matter by youths.

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204 Almost every cottage in Inis Beag has a radio, or "wireless," and although the folk seldom read books, a wide assortment of domestic and foreign magazines
• 207 and newspapers find their way into most homes. These mass media also are an emancipating force making for restiveness and discontent, because they allow islanders a glimpse behind the "lace curtain" at what appears to be a happier and
177 freer world. Television was introduced into Inis Beag in 1963 at the lighthouse,
207 and a second set was procured for the new "dance hall" when it was completed two years later. Few islanders venture to the lighthouse to view television, but I am told by correspondents that many now visit the hall during the several evening hours when transmission from Telefis Eireann takes place. As a result, television has become an acculturative medium to be reckoned with. Both radio and television programs are censored in Ireland, but even so the morality expressed in them—especially in the sex and violence drenched American ones—presents a striking contrast to locally conceived moral precepts. A hypothetical censor from Inis Beag most certainly would create more discontinuities with his shears in television performances than would his much maligned "secularized" colleagues in Dublin. My wife and I found that viewing television with islanders at the lighthouse on two occasions was a traumatic experience; it gave us a different (and even more disquieting) perspective on programs in the United States and their enculturative effects than can be obtained at home.

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873 Since the Second World War, 28 island youths have pursued secondary education elsewhere in Ireland, either in high schools, called "colleges," or in technical schools, and most have been supported by government scholarships. The usual high school scholarship is for 5 years, and a student must be 14 years of age and qualify by competitive examination to receive one. Only 4 of these 28 students
873 —of which 2 are teachers in the national school—have returned to Inis Beag. One
[562] young man watched 2 girls, either of whom he eventually might have married, go off to the mainland for school and said, "Scholarships are killing the island;" what he was referring to, other than his own disappointment, is the fact that 19 of the 28 students who left for advanced education are girls. The reason for the disproportionate number of girls receiving scholarships is that they are far more moti-
[829] vated academically and have better scholastic records than boys. There is, however, a widespread belief in the island that certain families are favored by priests and

17: Messenger E-4,5 (1958-1966)1971 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
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Beag, only limited amounts of which have been reported in this chapter. Even though sexual repression and fear of the clergy prevent the folk from being outspoken in this matter, it is constantly broached among themselves.

Paramount among external factors stimulating emigration are prosperity on the mainland and abroad, the impact of the mass media of communication, the increasing number of tourists visiting Inis Beag, the return of former emigrants, and the fact that, with an increase in incomes and scholarship funds, more island children are going to the mainland for their schooling each year. America has been a land of freedom and prosperity to the Irish since before the famine, and, until the Second World War, most islanders migrated there never to return. But the growth of prosperity in England following 1946 shifted the stream of emigration in that direction, for not only were jobs plentiful across the Irish Sea, but large, viable ethnic communities served by Irish clergy had sprung up in big cities. And it was possible to visit Ireland frequently, as the distance and cost are slight compared to a journey across the Atlantic. It is common for youths vacationing in Inis Beag from England to talk others into returning with them. The latter declare that they will soon come back to the island to settle permanently, hopefully with "great riches," but they seldom return. Since the war, a number of "Yanks" have also returned home, and their stories of life in America make the youthful islanders restive. Tourists who remain for weeks and months in Inis Beag and come to know many folk also sow the seeds of discontent.

Television was introduced into Inis Beag during 1963, and the two sets now installed always have ready and willing audiences. Almost every cottage has a radio, and, although the islanders seldom read books, a wide assortment of domestic and foreign magazines and newspapers find their way into most homes. These mass media also are an emancipating force making for restiveness and discontent, as they allow the islanders to glimpse behind the "lace curtain" at what appears to be a happier and freer world. Television and radio programs are censored, but, even so, the morality expressed in them—especially the sex and violence drenched American ones—presents a striking contrast to locally conceived moral precepts. A censor from Inis Beag would most certainly create more discontinuities in films with his shears than do his much maligned "secularized" colleagues in Dublin.

Most of what I have written in this essay is to be found expressed in the works of such older Irish writers as James Joyce, Sean O'Casey,